inherent weakness of the gardens due to poor yields arising out of poor condition of the garden and factory, poor garden management and the management's excessive reliance on debt with negligible equity infusion etc.

Ban on duty free import of pepper for export

790. SHRIMATI VANGA GEETHA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government has banned duty-free imports of pepper for export production under the Advance License Scheme as per media reports; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI KAMAL NATH): (a) and (b) The duty free import of pepper under the Advance Licensing Scheme has been stopped *vide* Public Notices No. 31/2004—2009, dated 14.12.2004 and 33/2004—2009, dated 17.12.2004.

Import of fish and fish products from Thailand

791. SHRI N.K. PREMACHANDRAN: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government accorded permission for the duty free import of 82 (eighty two) varieties of fish and fish products from Thailand; and

(b) whether Government propose to review the above decision?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI KAMAL NATH): (a) India and Thailand have signed a Framework Agreement on 9th October, 2003 for working towards establishing a Free Trade Area (FTA). The key elements of the Framework Agreement cover Goods, Services and Investments, and Areas of Economic Cooperation. The Framework Agreement also provides for an Early Harvest Scheme (EHS) under which common items have been agreed for elimination of tariffs on a fast track basis. The implementation of the Early Harvest Programme commenced from 1.9.2004. It includes 4 items of fish and fish products at 6-digit HS Code, *viz.* Salmon (160411); Sardines, sardinella and brisling or sprats (160413); Mackerel (160415) and Crab (160510).

(b) There is no proposal to review the decision.